NOVUM TESTAMENTUM

AN INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY FOR NEW TESTAMENT AND RELATED STUDIES BASED ON INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

VOLUME VIII





LEIDEN E. J. BRILL 1966

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PRINTED IN THE NETHERLANDS

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THE PLACE OF ISRAEL IN LUKE'S GOSPEL

BY

Dr. J. VAN GOUDOEVER

Hilversum

IGNAZ MAYBAUM in his book *The Face of God after Auschwitz* (Polak en Van Gennep, Amsterdam 1965) has shown that we cannot study theology anymore without trying to realise what happened in what he called the third "churban", the monstruosity of killing six millions of Jews and so many other people. Therefore in this article we will bear in mind the tragic conflict between Christians and Jews in the twentieth century, and from this memory we will take a retrospective and creative view on the origin of the messianic movement at the beginning of our era.

The present author chooses Luke's attitude towards Israel, especially in his gospel. Luke writing his gospel after 70 C.E. must have seen that the larger part of the Jews could not and would not accept the messianic movement which would uproot the existence of Israel, in a very time that this existence was menaced from outside by the Roman Empire. This schism between Israel and the messianic movement was not yet so clearly visible during Paul's life.

The scheme of the Acts

When Luke wrote his Gospel he had the composition of the Acts in his mind. This supposition is at least reasonable. The composition of the Acts, so typical of Luke, is quite clear in itself: It starts with Jerusalem 1) and ends with Rome; it starts with Peter and ends with Paul; it starts with Israel and ends in the midst of the nations. The point half-way Jerusalem-Rome seems to be Antiochia. There, for the first time, the Gospel is preached both to Jews and Gentiles; in Antiochia Jesus' disciples were first called *christianoi* 2), which may be translated by "messianic people", meaning people who are willing to build a messianic fellowship both for

2) Acts xi 26.

¹⁾ Cf. B. GERHARDSSON, Memory and Manuscript, Uppsala, 1961, p. 274.

Jews and Gentiles. At the end of his Book of Acts Luke mentions Paul's words to the Jews, "Let it be known to you then that this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; they will listen" 1). Luke has put these words on purpose at the end of Acts. For us twentieth century readers the end of Acts is rather the beginning of our church history.

But Luke must have written the Acts in order to give a history of the messianic movement, and the end of this book points in a way to the goal of the messianic movement: Gods word shall reach the end of the earth and come to Rome, the centre of the oikoumene.

Israel has to know this, whether it will listen or not.

The end of the Acts gives a perspective to the future, just as the end of the Book of Deuteronomy concludes the Thora, seeing forward to the Entry into the Promised Land. Such an end gives a description of not yet realised eschatology.

Bearing this in mind we read in Acts Chapter xxviii 26-28:

"Go to this people, and say,
You shall indeed hear but never understand,
and you shall indeed see but never perceive.
For this people's heart has grown dull,
and their ears are heavy of hearing,
and their eyes they have closed;
lest they should perceive with their eyes,
and hear with their ears
and understand with their heart,
and turn for me to heal them."

The whole book of Acts bears witness to the fact that God has sent his salvation to the nations. Everybody can see and hear it, at least in Luke's opinion. And the Jews could read it in their Thora and Prophets. If still they do not recognize these facts then Isaiah is right. This is a prophetical and therefore hypothetical truth. From this messianic perspective a light falls back on the Gospel and the life of Jesus. This Gospel seems to be a prelude to the messianic movement.

¹⁾ Acts xxviii 28.

The universality of Luke's gospel

It is generally recognized that Luke's gospel is universal in outlook. It is therefore that Luke traced Jesus' tholedoth up to Adam, son of God. By placing it just after Jesus' baptism he made every baptised man recognise himself in this son of Adam, son of God. The Lukan tholedoth go through Israel up to the nations.

The sermon in the Synagogue of Nazareth is a kind of *midrashic* development of a well-known saying of Jesus: "No prophet is acceptable in his own country" 1). In the other two synoptic gospels the people at Nazareth took offence at Jesus because they recognized in this Master the carpenter of the village. There Jesus explained this offence by saying: "A prophet is not without honour except in his own country, and amoung his own kin, and in his own house" 2).

But in Luke's gospel Jesus foresaw the offence of his own people and explained why he did not work in his own place: Just as once Elia and Elisa, he could not restrict his work to Israel. On hearing this "all in the synagogue were filled with wrath" 3).

For the purpose of contrast Luke made a sharp distinction between this "wrath" in the synagogue against the universality of Jesus' mission and Paul's pledge for universality at the end of the Acts.

In the story of Simon Peter's call Luke has visualized what will happen when Peter will indeed 'catch men'. The catch will be so enormous that the nets will be breaking and the boats sinking. This messianic catch (of the nations) will be a danger for Israel, "Depart from me, said Peter, for I am a sinful man" 4).

Again and again Luke stressed the point in his gospel: The salvation is not restricted to Israel. He realized the great problem for Israel and tried to understand its feelings toward this messianic movement: "And the people sought and came to him, and would have kept him from leaving them; but he said, "I must preach the good news of the kingdom of God to the other cities also; for I was sent for this purpose". ⁵)

The blessing on the eyes

After the Mission of the Seventy Luke put the following blessing of Jesus on the eyes, "Blessed are the eyes which see what you see!

¹⁾ Luke iv 24

⁴⁾ Luke v 8.

²⁾ Mark vi 4.

⁵⁾ Luke iv 42-52.

³⁾ Luke iv 28.

For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear, and did not hear it." 1) There is a slight but important difference between Luke's and Matthew's wording of this blessing. Matthew handed down the following words, "Blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear" 2). In Matthew's gospel the eyes of the disciples are blessed because they see; in Luke's gospel those eyes are blessed that see, what the disciples see. So according to Luke it was important what the eyes of the disciples could see. Well, of course they could see the Mission of the Seventy to the end of the earth, a prelude to the Pouring out of the Holy Spirit. Many prophets and kings desired to see this messianic movement, they have foreseen it, but it was not yet there. Now it is reality. Everybody can see and hear it. So far as Luke's gospel is concerned.

According to Matthew's gospel formerly the people's hearts had grown dull, their ears heavy of hearing, and their eyes they had closed, just as Isaiah said ³). But the disciples' eyes are blessed because they see. Luke has postponed Isaiah's prophecy against the Jews who do not see and hear till the end of the Acts ⁴).

The key of knowledge

At the end of the woes to Pharisees and Lawyers Luke mentions a woe to the Lawyers (Thora-scholars) which can be found in Matthew's gospel too, though in other words: "Woe to you lawyers! for you have taken away the key of knowledge; you did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering" 5). The slight difference is that in Matthew's gospel the scribes and Pharisees have "shut the kingdom of heaven against men" 6).

Luke's pronouncement on the key of knowledge being taken away is interesting against the background of the last chapter of this gospel, because there the resurrected Christ "opened their minds to understand the scriptures" 7). And when the scriptures are opened what will they read there? "The Messiah should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and repentance and forgiveness should be preached in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem" 8).

¹⁾ Luke x 23-24.

²⁾ Matth. xiii 16.

³⁾ Matth. xiii 14-15.

⁴⁾ See p. 112.

⁵⁾ Luke xi 52.

⁶⁾ Matth. xxiii 13.

⁷⁾ Luke xxiv 45

⁸⁾ Luke xxiv 46-47.

In Luke's gospel Jesus reproached the Thora-scholars with taking away this key of knowledge, thus hindering the people to understand the real significance of Thora and Prophets, namely that repentance and forgiveness should be preached to all nations. Luke was quite sure that Thora and Prophets were looking forward towards this messianic message.

The Banquet in the messianic Kingdom

The next example is the pericope on the Banquet in the messianic Kingdom. By comparing Luke with Matthew we may see what is typical of Luke's gospel.

At the end of this pericope in Luke's gospel Jesus said: "And men will come from east and west, and from north and south, and sit at table in the kingdom of God" 1). Comparing this saying with Matthew viii II "many will come from east and west", it is clear that Luke added the words "and from north and south", thus stressing the universality of the messianic kingdom. But there are more differences between Matthew and Luke regarding this pericope. In Matthew's gospel we can read, "I tell you, many will come from east and west and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness" 2). Again comparing this with Luke we can see that Luke probably added to the words "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob" the words "and all the prophets" (Luke xiii 28), thus including in Gods kingdom as many of Israel as is possible.

But who are excluded? This was the question for Luke. He may have known Matthew's answer: The sons of the Kingdom ³). The present author wonders whether this is an expression of a kind of anti-Judaism (anti-Semitism is an anachronism) in Matthew's gospel. It may be, but Matthew's gospel grew up in Jewish circles and is therefore sometimes anti-Pharisaic. Luke does not preach that the sons of the kingdom will be excluded, but "you yourselves" ⁴). We must ask against which people this rather vague saying is meant. Luke makes clear: "You will begin to say, "we ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets" ⁵). There is a sense of humour in these words: To eat and to drink and to live in the same time and the same place as the Messiah does not

¹⁾ Luke xiii 29.

⁴⁾ Luke xiii 28.

²⁾ Matth. viii 11-12.

⁵⁾ Luke xiii 26

³⁾ Matth. viii 12.

give any claim to sit at the messianic banquet. Luke must have changed here a saying in Matthew's gospel: "On that day many will say to me, "Lord, Lord, did not we prophecy in your name, and cast demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" 1). Luke not being anti-Pharisaic changed this saying in order to make clear who will be excluded from the messianic banquet and why. Not because of their works, but because they did nothing, but eat and drink in the days of the Messiah. Those people will be excluded.

Luke concludes the whole pericope on the messianic banquet by a well-known saying in his time, but which he changed just a little: "And behold, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" 2). In Matthew's gospel there are two variants of this saying: "many that are first will be last, and the last first" 3); and in a much more apodeictic way: "So the last will be first, and the first last" 4). Apparently Luke has mitigated the saying, by making it less categorical and more dependent on man's attitude.

The parable of the vineyard

Luke's attitude toward Israel is perhaps most clear in the parable of the vineyard. At first sight there is not much difference between the versions in the synoptic gospels. But Luke changed the significance of the parable by adding one sentence. When the people (laos) heard the parable of the vineyard and especially the last words of it: "What then will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and destroy those tenants and give the vineyard to others", they said, "God forbid!" 5).

This typically Pauline word we find several times in the Letter to the Romans, just in connection with the relation Israel-Nations. E.g. "I ask, then, has God rejected his people? God forbid!" 6). By adding this word "God forbid" Luke transformed the whole parable of the vineyard from a verdict on Israel into a warning to Israel. How different is Matthew's version: "There Jesus asked the people, When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to the tenants? They said to him, He will put those wretches to a miserable death, and let out the vineyard to other

¹⁾ Matth. vii 22.

²⁾ Luke xiii 30.

³⁾ Matth. xix 30.

⁴⁾ Matth. xx 16.

⁵⁾ Luke xx 15-16.

⁶⁾ Rom. xi 1.

tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons" 1). By saying this the people expressed their own verdict on the tenants of the vineyard, and Jesus quoted a well-known passage from Psalm 118 to support this verdict: "The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes?" 2). At last Jesus—in Matthew's gospel—pronounced the verdict as a fact: "Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation producing the fruits of it" 3).

In Luke's gospel the parable remains a warning to Israel. When the people had said, "God forbid!" Jesus looked at them and said, "What then is this that is written:

"The very stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner"?

"Everyone who falls on that stone will be broken into pieces; but when it falls on any one it will crush him" 4).

This is a prophetic warning without a definite verdict on the tenants of the vineyard. From this point of view we can understand another difference between Matthew and Luke. Matthew stressed the fact that the tenants of the vineyard "beat, killed, and stoned" the servants. Luke mitigated this point and twice stressed another aspect of the parable: In his gospel the tenants sent the servants away twice "empty-handed". Here lies the serious problem for Luke: The vineyard has to bring forth fruit.

It may be that the allegory of the True Vine in John's gospel is the result of a kind of *midrashic* development of this parable. In this allegory the Messiah says, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch of mine that bears no fruit, he takes away, and every branch that bears he prunes that it may bear more fruit" ⁵).

The parable of the fig tree

The story of the cursing of the fig tree, which we find in Mark and Matthew, was in Luke's eyes probably a parable. At any rate

¹⁾ Matth. xxi 40-41.

 ²⁾ Matth. xxi 42.
 3) Matth. xxi 43.

⁴⁾ Luke xx 17-18.

⁵⁾ John xv 1-2.

he retold the story as a parable. In the original story, to be found in Mark and Matthew, the fig tree is cursed, but Luke transformed this story into a parable in which the owner of the vineyard threatens to cut down the fig tree. The parable runs as follows: "A man has a fig tree in his vineyard; and he came seeking fruit on it and found none. And he said to the vinedresser, 'Lo, these three years I have come to seeking fruit on this fig tree, and I find none. Cut it down; why should it use up the ground' "1). Comparing Luke with the other synoptics one must admit that the parable is much more reasonable than the story, because in the parable the man had been seeking fruit for already three years. And when he found none he did not curse the tree, but asked the vinedresser why it should use up the ground. And now the great difference! The vinedresser in Luke's parable pleads for the fig tree; "Leave it alone, sir, this year also, till I dig about it and put on manure. And if it bears fruit next year, well and good; but if not, ... you can cut it down" 2).

These last words do not sound quite polite: "You can cut it down". But the vinedresser apologizes, not being the man to cut down anything. In all three gospels the fig tree stands for Israel. Luke himself feels like a vinedresser. He did not accept the responsibility to cut down Israel.

The Parable of the Excuses

Although Matthew's parable of the King's Marriage Feast 3) is quite different from Luke's Parable of the Excuses 4) not only in wording but also in essence, we may be sure that it was originally one and the same parable. In general Luke borrowed material from Matthew (Q is only a hypothesis). So Luke may have known from tradition the parable of the King's Marriage Feast, as it is told in Matthew. He wondered why those invited did not come to the feast. Luke is interested in the excuses of those invited just as he was in the parable of the Banquet in the messianic Kingdom. Matthew's gospel only told: "They made light of it and went off, one to his field, another to his business, while the rest seized his servants, treated them shamefully and killed them" 5). Besides this Matthew put the whole parable in an anti-Judaistic frame:

¹⁾ Luke xiii 6-7.

⁴⁾ Luke xiv 16-24. 2) Luke xiii 8-9. 5) Matth. xxii 5-6.

³⁾ Matth. xxii 2-13.

"The king was angry, and he sent his troops and destroyed those murderers and burned their city" 1). This is of course an allusion to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. Luke left out this anti-Judaism and concentrated on the motives why people did not accept the invitation to sit at the feast. Luke distinguishes three motives: "The first said to him, "I have bought a field 2), and I must go and see it; I pray you, have me excused". And another said, "I have bought five yoke of oxen 3), and I go to examine them; I pray you, have me excused". And another said "I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come" '4). So these are the three excuses why people did not accept the invitation. Having heard these motives the master of the feast could say, "For I tell you, none of those men who were invited shall taste my banquet" 5). He could say this not because of an anti-Judaistic sentiment, but because of their own motives.

When the servant—in Luke's gospel—came and reported the excuses of the invited people the master said in anger to his servant, "Go out quickly to the streets and lanes and bring in the poor and maimed and blind and lame" 6). This is quite in agreement with Jesus' saying to the Pharisees in Luke xiv 12-13, "When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your kinsmen or rich neighbours". They will have their excuses as is shown in the parable. "But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame and the blind".

In Luke's Parable of the Excuses there was after those two invitations still room in the house of the feast. Therefore Luke added a third invitation: "And the master said to the servant, "go out to the highways and hedges, and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled" '7. In Luke's eyes this third invitation is probably destined for the nations. Are therefore the first invited ones the Jews? Not quite. They are the friends of the master of the feast, friends who have their excuses. So they are not refused because of their Jewishness, but because of their excuses; and what kind of excuses they used!

¹⁾ Matth. xxii 7.

²⁾ Cf. Matth. xxii 5.
3) Cf. the business in Matth. xxii 5.

⁴⁾ Luke xiv 18-20.

⁵⁾ Luke xiv 24.

⁶⁾ Cf. Matth. xxii 9-10.

⁷⁾ Luke xiv 23.

The Parable of the Pounds

Luke's Parable of the Pounds must be a variant of the Parable of the Talents which can be found in Matthew. Comparing the one with the other we arrive at the conclusion that 'the Talents' is older. Luke may have read in the Parable of the Talents that a man going on a journey called his servants. Luke recognized in this man Christ "who went into a far country to receive kingly power" 1). Further Luke was 'impressed' by the fact that this prince entrusted his property to his servants! This was really a grand act of the prince! In Luke's eyes he did not give the whole of his property, but only ten pounds to his ten servants. To each servant one pound! What would his citizens say to this generosity? They hated him and sent an embassy after him, saying, "we do not want this man to reign over us"2). Reading this we must bear in mind that the citizens have already got their property. It was for the first time that servants could get some property. Still the citizens hated this prince who gave some of his property to his servants.

When the king returns, which will be at the *parousia*, he will call his servants. The first who has gained ten pounds will then get ten *cities*, and the second who has gained five pounds will get five *cities*. In other words, those servants will become citizens, they will even get authority over so and so many cities. Is this an allusion to an apostolic authority?

The parable has a cruel end. The king in the parable says, "But as for those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me" 3). These harsh words of the king are not so typical of Luke who always stressed the possibility of forgiveness. But first of all the end of the parable points to the *parousia*. So in a certain sense this end of the parable can be compared with the end of Acts. There, and only there the holy Spirit speaking through Isaiah was right saying "You shall indeed hear and never understand".

And in the second place: When citizens cannot bear that servants are entrusted with some property they are not worth being called citizens. It seems that in this parable also the citizens stand for Israel, and the servants for the nations. But what kind of Israel was so narrow-minded that it could not accept any care for the

¹⁾ Luke xix 12.

²⁾ Luke xix 14.

³⁾ Luke xix 27.

nations? The present author supposes that Luke had in mind the Essenes, because in his conception of history the messianic movement started as a kind of sect like the Essenes but with a strong anti-Essene tendency. The early life of this sect with its meals and its Feast of Weeks such as Feast of Covenant and of Revelation resembled the life of the Qumran sect, but the whole set-up of the Book of Acts with its universal tendency is just anti-Essene. Here lies for Luke the great antithesis: the narrow-mindedness of people like the Essenes and the universality of the messianic movement, which he describes in the Acts.

The Parable of the Father and his two Sons

The present author thinks it very plausible that Luke told the so-called Parable of the Prodigal Son as a re-interpretation of the parable of the two Sons in Matthew's gospel 1). Luke recognized in those sons: Israel and the nations, and retold the parable in such a way that the elder son stands for Israel and the younger one for the nations. It is for this reason that Luke began the parable by mentioning the father of the two sons, because the two sons—Israel and the nations—had to learn to live together in one and the same house. This was the problem Luke faced in his time.

In Luke's parable the father said to the elder son—Israel—, "Son you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It was fitting to make merry and be glad, for this your brother was dead, and is alive; he was lost and is found" 2). This is what the Father asks Israel: to be glad when its brother is found alive. But this very thing was the greatest problem for Israel. Here ends the parable and it is an open question whether Israel accepted his Father's invitation to enter into the house where the younger brother is too. Luke does not suggest any answer.

The younger brother has found the Father's house after long wanderings. He went the way through death to life. That is the way of the nations. Israel is always with the Father. But for the nations Christ's resurrection means: the Way to Life.

The dialogue between the rich man and father Abraham

The dialogue between the rich man and father Abraham, which is only handed down to us in Luke's gospel, ends with these words

¹⁾ Matth. xxi 28-32.

¹⁾ Luke xv 31-32.

of the rich man: "Then I beg you, father, to send him (Lazarus) to my father's house, for I have five brothers, so that he warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment". But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them". And the rich man said, "No, father Abraham; but if some one goes to them from the dead, they will repent". He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead" 1).

This is a remarkable statement on Israel: They have to hear the Thora of Moses and the Prophets. If not, they will not be convinced by some one rising from the dead. When Luke wrote these words he must have realized that Christ arose from the dead. But Luke was of the opinion that Christ's Resurrection will indeed have a significance for the nations, but not for Israel.

Israel has its own way to the Father. So we may connect this dialogue with the afore-mentioned parable of the Father and his two Sons. There also the elder son—Israel—does not come to the Father on the way through death to life. He is always with the Father.

A saying concerning old and new wine

Luke probably found in the traditional gospel material the saying "No one puts new wine into old wineskins; if he does, the new wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins" 2).

Luke could agree with this saying, but wondered why nothing is said about old wine. Like Jesus Sirach, "Forsake not an old friend, for a new one does not compare with him. A new friend is like new wine; when it has aged you will drink it with pleasure" 3).

To Israel the Thora is like old wine. Therefore Luke added to the traditional saying: "And no one after drinking old wine desires new; for he says, "The old is good" 4). We may interpret these words in this sense that Luke understood that many Jews having drunk the old wine (i.e. the Thora), did not like the new wine (i.e. the gospel). But according to Luke the Thora and the Prophets were looking forward to the messianic time. In John's gospel we can find the development of this saying, namely in the story of the Marriage at Cana. There the steward of the feast called the bride-

¹⁾ Luke xvi 27-31.

²⁾ Mark ii 22; Matth. ix 17.

³⁾ Jes. Sir. ix 10.

⁴⁾ Luke v 39.

groom and said to him, "Every man serves the good wine first; and when men have drunk freely, then the poor wine; but you have kept the good wine until now". 1).

How to find the rock upon which to build?

In general we may conclude that Luke is interested in the motives why Jews did not accept the messianic movement. Israel has its own way to the Father. On the other hand Thora and Prophets refer to the messianic movement. And Israel has to see and to hear that the Holy Spirit is sent not only to Israel but also to the nations.

Both Israel and the nations have to bear fruit. Not all the Jews are automatically "sons of Abraham". Only after Zacchaeus offered his good to the poor could Jesus call him "son of Abraham" 2).

Against this background we can understand a small addition which Luke made at the end of the Sermon on the Plain. He may have read in the traditional gospel material: "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain and the flood came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded upon the rock" 3). Luke may have thought how it is possible for everybody to find this "rock". Therefore he added these words to this traditional text: "he is like a man building a house, who dug deep, and laid the foundation upon rock" 4). Before anyone can build upon a rock he has to "dig deep". Then he will find the rock. This applies to everybody, to Israel too, although Israel ought to know where to find the "rock".

With these examples I have tried to make clear that Luke gave special attention to Israel. Luke was prudent in his attitude towards Israel—probably because he realized the tragic situation for Israel after 70 C.E. On the other hand Luke was quite convinced of the rightness of the messianic movement. The only thing he could hope was that the Jews acknowledged that the Holy Spirit was sent to the nations too. Luke was not prepared to exclude Israel from salvation. Only these "who eat and drink" in the messianic time and who have their excuses shall be excluded. But on the whole Luke's gospel tried to include in the messianic kingdom as many from Israel and the nations as possible.

¹⁾ John ii 10.

³⁾ Matth. vii 24-25.

²⁾ Luke xix 9. 4) Luke vi 48.